

PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION MEETING #1 MEETING SUMMARY

May 22, 2014 7:00PM, Plaistow Town Hall

NHDOT Team: Shelley Winters, Patrick Herlihy

Project Advisory Committee Attendees:

- Town of Plaistow – Sean Fitzgerald;
(Alternate) Tim Moore
- Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
- Todd Fontanella
- Town of Atkinson – David Harrigan;
(Alternate) Robert J. Clark
- Rockingham Planning Commission –
Cliff Sinnott

HDR Team: Ron O’Blenis, John Weston, Kris Erikson, Jamie Paine

INTRODUCTIONS AND INITIAL PROJECT ACTIVITY

Patrick Herlihy began the meeting by introducing himself as the Director of Aeronautics Rail and Transit at NHDOT and Shelley Winters as the Administrator for the Bureau of Rail and Transit and the NHDOT project manager of the study.

Shelley Winters:

She explained that this will be the first official public meeting for the study in which work efforts will be presented. She affirmed that public input will help shape the direction of the project as it moves forward. HDR is the consultant assisting NHDOT in the federal environmental review process for the study that is overseen by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The study will develop information to evaluate the merits of rail service. This will include determination of where associated facilities would be located. At the end of the study we will develop a recommended alternative that will be considered if it should be progressed to implementation.

It was noted that there will be a total of three public meeting and we will be looking for input at different stages of the process, not only from the Public Advisory Committee but from the local citizens.

All updated information will be available on the project's Facebook page along with the NHDOT project website.

Ron O'Brien:

Shelley introduced Ron O'Brien who is the lead of the project from HDR.

A PowerPoint presentation was given to identify project work to date and planned activities to evaluate the extension of the MBTA Haverhill line from Haverhill, MA to Plaistow, NH.

He noted that there had been a listening session in August 2013 to begin the project. That meeting was held prior to any work beginning on the project. The listening session was intended to convey to the public that the study was being initiated without any preconceived assumptions.

He gave an overview of the NEPA process, which is the federal mandated environmental process. The NEPA process is organized to provide a structured and objective process to evaluate a potential project. The process is focused on facilitation of public input during the process and develops alternatives that can be considered by the public and public officials to determine if the potential project should be moved forward.

To facilitate input from the public, a Public Advisory Committee (PAC) has been formed. Members are David Harrigan from Atkinson, Sean Fitzgerald from Plaistow, Cliff Sinnott from Rockingham Planning Commission, Todd Fontanella from Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, Cynthia Scarano from Pan Am Railways, Jim Russell from Northern New England Rail Authority, and Ron Morgan from MBTA. A representative of the City of Haverhill will be part of future meetings. PAC members from the study team are Shelley Winters from NHDOT and Ron O'Brien, John Weston, Kris Erikson, Katie Rougeot, and Jamie Paine from the HDR Team.

The first PAC meeting discussed the scope, purpose, and need of the project, the project agreements (that eliminated the Westville Homes and 144 Main Street property owned by the Town of Plaistow for consideration of station or train layover sites), and the basis for progressing the study. At the second PAC meeting, the purpose and need were reviewed in more detail. Additionally, initial site options were reviewed. At the third PAC meeting, further development of the site options was discussed in preparation for this public meeting.

PURPOSE AND NEED

It was noted that in the NEPA process there is a requirement to define the purpose and need for the project. At the end of the study process, the site options must be consistent with the purpose and need of the project. The draft purpose is to provide an additional

travel mode option that increases overall mobility in Plaistow and surrounding communities. The needs are to increase mobility and provide additional travel options for the community.

The need is linked to economic development, understanding the community's master plan, and how the extension of commuter rail in Plaistow fits into the region. Frequently, economic development is linked to rail projects and this is part of the needs identified for this project as well.

Reference was made to a slide titled MBTA Commuter Rail Lines. It was explained how geographically a Plaistow location is comparable to other lines of the MBTA system and even how it fits into the region.

SITE OPTIONS

It was noted that site option attributes were analyzed to assist with evaluation of options are based on community needs, environmental impacts, and train service operations for the MBTA passenger and Pam Am Railway's freight operations.

For the community attributes, the study looked at the parcels being impacted, distance to the residents, noise, impact to adjacent business, how does the site option supports potential development, and how it fits to the Master Plan.

Environmental attributes are part of the federal process. The study will look at the wetlands, stream crossing, and wildlife habitat. Historical and archeological land will be a main focus because many of the sites are potentially located on these sensitive areas.

Service operations attributes consider how the project fits into the MBTA train operations. The project will be about possible passenger service. Currently the rail line has freight and the Amtrak Downeaster in the study area is freight. The agreement is the freight operations will continue and not impacted by any project alternatives.

REQUIREMENTS

The main requirements for a station were explained. It was noted that platforms must be a sufficient length to serve the full length train and the station needs parking and pick up/drop off areas. The station will be designed to MBTA Standards as this is to be an extension for the MBTA.

This station will be a terminal station, which means there will need to be some train holding capacity. The station needs a dedicated track where the trains can wait until a return trip without being on the mainline. Platform must be 815-ft provide for maximum train of 9 cars

(the design size of the MBTA system), which will allow for anyone to exit the train on the platform. The station must provide parking and access road.

The layover facility is where trains are parked at night. Trains are stored from the last trip of the day to the first trip in the morning. The preferred location is directly off the mainline, as close as possible to the station and on the same side of the station. When considering freight and a double track, as in this case, having the station and layover on opposite sides causes conflicts. The layover must meet the MBTA standards and accommodate the 6 train sets that are used on the Haverhill line. The layover will have space between tracks for train car servicing, employee parking and access road.

NEWBURYPORT COMPARISON

To illustrate elements of a layover site, the Newburyport layover and station were presented for comparison to how a station and layover may be configured in Plaistow. Newburyport is also a terminal station, meaning the train stops here and returns to Boston. The station is not located in the same spot as the layover facility. The station platform runs along the mainline and the trains run in and out of the layover facility. A major roadway divides the layover and station.

The station platform is typical of the MBTA, it is raised platform with tracks on both side. There is station building with appendices. The reason for the spacing between the tracks is for light maintenance. The hotel power is to plug the trains into electric power at night to operate the heating or air conditioning of the cars at night to decrease noise.

MITIGATION

In development of alternatives and consider the attributes of a site it is noted that sometimes there are impacts. In considering an alternative, means to mitigate these impacts is also evaluated. Noise and visual impact can usually be mitigated by a noise wall or visual barrier.

If the facility is close to residents, vibration impacts can be mitigated through the use of rubber mats or larger ballast selections. Vibration is usually an issue with moving trains rather than standing trains.

Wetlands are a major aspect to consider. The study team will be going into the field and looking at GIS data to further evaluate wetland impacts for possible sites.

The team will evaluate noise by first developing a baseline for existing noise. Standard federal guidelines and methodology will then be used to calculate potential impacts. The

amount and type of impact will then be used to evaluate means to mitigate the impacts for each alternative that is evaluated.

OVERVIEW MAP

A location map was presented to depict the location of options that were to be presented. There were three area groupings. The northern section is in the Kingston Road area, then the middle cluster is located between Route 125 and Main Street in Plaistow, and southern area is southerly of Route 125 to an area just over the state line in Haverhill, MA.

John Weston:

It was explained that the study is in the beginning in the exploratory process. The study team has identified what is believed to be every potential site that a layover and station could fit. The site options were limited to locations that would not require taking a lot of valuable property or homes.

It was noted that the study team is going to look at all the options then consolidate to two or three alternatives that will be evaluated further by acquiring more detailed information.

Ron O'Brien:

It was noted that the reason we only go as far as the Plaistow/Newton town line is due to the agreement with Pan Am Railroad and the MBTA that limits the potential expansion of commuter rail service to a milepost that is approximately at the Plaistow/Newton town line.

SITE OPTIONS

It was explained the direction in which the site options will be presented begin at the Newton town line and continue southward to Plaistow, Atkinson, and Haverhill.

Discussion of the site options began with Layover 1. It was explained that the highlighted areas are the GIS maps for residential and the green and blue are wetlands and waterways. The layover is located near Kingston Road near the Newton/Plaistow town line. The site shows a layover facility only; there are six tracks with the separation to allow service access. This site has great impacts on existing business. It was noted that the businesses are Pro Bark Industries and Atlas Motor Express. From an operational point of view this layout works.

Station A is located on the opposite side of Layover 1 on Kingston Road. There are no wetlands, but a station on this site is not consistent with master plan. This site is located in a place assumed to be less attractive for potential service users.

Layover 2/Station B is located in the middle area; it is located next to 144 Main Street on the Testa property. The layover splits off the main line and is placed diagonally across the Testa site. Access to the station is off Joanne Drive.

The targeted potential ridership is 225 passengers. Detailed ridership will be completed in the future. This was used to create an initial station parking lot size.

Only one parcel is being impacted for Layover 2/Station B, but it is within the stream buffer and does not cross a stream. A question was asked, "What is the consultant's definition of impact?" It was noted that Impacted means part of the layout is in a resource area. If that is the case then it will need to be determined what the specific impacts are and how they could be mitigated. Another attendee brought up the noise issue, asked if the consultants would take into account added noise. It was explained that noise will be examined by determining noise impacts from to adjacent residents and other receptors.

Layover 3/Station C objective is to minimize potential property impacts. This layover is crossing a stream and generally resources agencies would see this as a significant negative impact. This site has potential for adjacent development and from an operational stand point it is good.

Station D is located in the same middle area, using the existing park and ride on Westville Road. As part of the station requirements there must be a separate track from the main line therefore the station is located to avoid the wetlands. This would require taking the tire property but would fit with the Master Plan vision and avoid wetlands.

Layover 8/Station F is located in the middle area. This site is located on Joanne Drive in a wooded area. The initial layout seeks to avoid the identified pond, but we will make field visits to get a better understand of the wetland impacts.

Layover 9/Station G is located on the 144 Main Street property and the Testa property. This was added after initial discussions with the town. This site is operationally good, minimum wetlands and provide for potential adjacent development.

Layover 4 is located in Plaistow closer to Haverhill. This layover is located beyond the Westville homes site and the Wal-Mart and Home Depot site. The layover has to cross a significant stream and there is a great elevation change on the site.

Layover 5/Station E seeks to eliminate some of the impacts of the elevations of Layover 4, but more of the stream is impacted.

Layover 7 is located in the same area as the Layover 4 and 5, but it is oriented in the opposite direction. This requires access through a private way off Route 125. There is a

stream crossing which will need to be looked at in more detail. A question was asked “What do the consultants consider close to residents?” It was noted that not near residents is about a quarter mile and at this point it is not as close as others.

Another attendee raised a concern about noise and asked if the additional noise from the trains will be considered. It was confirmed that they will be considered.

Layover 6 is located in Haverhill just over the state line. This site in Haverhill was developed to place the layover in a more industrial area away from residents. The downside is this layover is a great distance from any of the station. From an operational point of view it could require crossing the double main line, which is not ideal.

NEXT STEPS

The next steps for the study team will be addressing public comments and refining the alternatives as noted previously.

Activities will include looking at land use, neighborhood character, and zoning. While this has been done initially, there will be more detailed analysis. There will also be an evaluation of the social-economical and environmental justice. Air quality, noise and vibration will be evaluated further.

Through additional screening of the sites it will be determined if the sites have hazardous materials and how that may impact the alternatives. The visual and aesthetic considerations relates to how an alternative fits into the Town’s Master Plan. Reducing impacts to natural and cultural resources, specifically wetlands, will be a big part of the project. Operational feasibility will be analyzed to look at how an alternative works with existing and future freight or the passenger operations.

The ridership estimate will be looking into more detail, to determine the amount of ridership at this station. This will be used to refine the needed amount of parking.

The study team will be working with the PAC members to refine the alternatives, taking comments and input into the alternative development. A PAC meeting is planned for the end of July and a public meeting in September. *[Note: the next PAC meeting is scheduled for September 9th and a public meeting is scheduled for late September/early October]*

John Weston:

It was noted again that the presented options are concepts and that the study team will move next to evaluate the initial options to develop up to three alternatives for further evaluation. The alternatives could be combinations and/or refinements of the initial options. From the alternatives, the study team plans to screen the alternatives down to

one. This alternative will be presented for public comment. It was noted that the final alternative could be a no-build recommendation or an alternative for passenger service that could be considered for potential further development toward implementation.

It was noted that in addition comments taken during the question and answer session to follow that public comments can be provided online using the website.

Sean Fitzgerald:

It was noted that the Plaistow Board of Selectmen has reviewed all the sites except one layover 9, but that option was included in his presentation to the Board of Selectmen. Copies of his presentation were made available. It was noted that the presentation included a detailed review of each site with the pros and cons. It was noted that he has met with Atkinson officials and citizens to obtain their input.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

COMMENT: Catherine Webster (12 Jasmin Drive, Atkinson, NH) What is in hand outs and what is not? You are considering sites that are not in the handout at all, layover facility 7 in the handout and layover facility, 7 is substantially the same at 4 and 5 yet it is not listed in the cons (referring to Sean Fitzgerald handout) that there's serious opposition in Atkinson. From a traffic stand point, Atkinson has two points of access, both the midpoint locations would impact that east road access 4, 5, 6, 7 would impact the Rte. 121 Atkinson access to 495. This may cause more problems with traffic then it would solve. She was more concerned about the environmental impacts to wetlands behind the Bryant Woods. She asked the consultants what their favored locations were. **RESPONSE: Ron O'Blenis** The presentation from Sean was for the selectmen to help them understand where we were in the process. Sites 8 and 9 were added after speaking with the selectmen. Traffic will be analyzed, ridership will help us understand where people will be coming from and what level of congestion that may be. Noise and vibration will be analyzed and some mitigation used could be a noise wall. The site visits to address wetlands are planned for after this meeting. At this point we have not picked, we are presenting all the options, more analysis is required. **RESPONSE: Sean Fitzgerald** The presentation handed out was developed almost two months ago and updates have been made since then.

COMMENT: Alexandra Pechy & Daughter (128 Newton Rd Plaistow, NH) Alexandra supports the project; she and her daughter spend a lot of time traveling to Boston for medical care. She emphasized the need for mobility for disabled individuals. A train coming into Plaistow could be a "lifeline" for people that do not have a car, limited mobility and need to get to the city.

COMMENT: Audrey Peck (206 Oak Ridge Rd Plaistow, NH) She asked where the 225 riders came from. **RESPONSE: Ron O’Blenis** This is based on the existing ridership from Haverhill and comparison of ridership from other MBTA stations. The study team will update the ridership estimate that is based on a ridership modeling analysis. **COMMENT: Audrey Peck** She explained that she only sees 8-10 cars registered in NH at the Haverhill Station. She asked how the consultants plan to obtain the hard data for the ridership. **RESPONSE: John Weston** The consultants will develop a ridership model created by Federal Transit Administration. It uses real time data from cell phones and tracks traffic patterns. The model will be used with information from the MBTA ridership models. Along with that, we will use population and employment information from the State of MA, Boston MPO, and Rockingham MPO. We will pull all that information together to have an understanding how people move back and forth. This data is used to develop ridership for work trips only. We want to be able to understand how many people from Plaistow go to Boston. **RESPONSE: Sean Fitzgerald** Ten years ago the town knew that 50% of residents traveled south to MA. The importance of the study is to get an understanding of ridership.

COMMENT: John Halloran (Collard Rd) Asked what is the problem with the existing layover and station in Haverhill. John is concerned about the ridership data not being accurate and building something that is not necessary. **RESPONSE: Ron O’Blenis** The methodology we use is reasonably accurate, as John Weston said after we development the models we will come back to the public with detailed analysis.

COMMENT: Steve Halloran (Newton Rd Plaistow, NH) Asked why is the station only moving 5 miles up the road from Bradford, why would you not go further north? **RESPONSE: Ron O’Blenis** The existing layover facility in Bradford holds four trains and the service runs 6 trains. Trains at night that do not have a space to stay in Bradford run a basically empty non revenue service into Boston and come back out in the day. There would be a relatively large expense to run between Bradford and Plaistow. **COMMENT: Steve Halloran** Why is it Plaistow’s problem to make up for the MBTA’s expenses? **RESPONSE: Ron O’Blenis** The facility in Bradford is not able to be expanded, the MBTA in the past looked to extend further north in Haverhill. Though this discussion there was some support to extend the service to Plaistow. The MBTA in exchange for the location of the layover in Plaistow would operate the trains and provide passenger service to Plaistow. **RESPONSE: Sean Fitzgerald** The State of MA appropriated \$10 million five years ago to move the layover north.

COMMENT: Steve Halloran Asked if anyone done analysis on Rt. 125? **RESPONSE: Sean Fitzgerald** Plaistow plans to widen Rt. 125 but it is unlikely to see other road widening.

COMMENT: Max P. (12 Spiny Ave) He advised that his Father runs Atlas Motor Express in Plaistow and asked what will be impacted with the layover being proposed? **RESPONSE:**

Ron O’Blenis If we located the layover facility in that section of Plaistow we would cut off the access to the existing business which would be a negative impact. The Town of Plaistow did not recommend this site as their preferred site.

COMMENT: Tom Kelley (Aspin Drive, Atkinson, NH) Asked if medical issues associated with rail would be analyzed. Expressed concern about the increase of noise from the layover.

RESPONSE: Ron O’Blenis The noise analysis will follow Federal Transit Administration model (that the Federal Railroad Administration has adopted for noise analysis). A base line of noise will be established then an estimated of added noise and how that will increase the base line. Impacts to receptors will be determined in the modeling.

COMMENT: Ms. Halloran (Newton Rd. Plaistow, NH) Why hasn’t the MBTA put up noise barriers at Bradford layover facility?

RESPONSE: Ron O’Blenis We can not speak for the MBTA but we can say that the number of complaints to the MBTA has decreased. The MBTA has set up a program limiting the amount of time a train can idle. Additionally, the newly purchased locomotives are dramatically quieter than previous generation.

COMMENT: Ron Snow (53 year resident of Plaistow) His land is located directly behind Westville Homes. His concern is the environment issues and vibration the layover will have on his house. **RESPONSE: Sean Fitzgerald** The Plaistow Board of Selectmen signed an agreement with NHDOT that Westville Homes will no longer be considered in the study.

COMMENT: Eric Bell (4 Tracy Ln Plaistow, NH) Concerned the ridership numbers produced will not be accurate. Believes people are incentivized to go to Bradford station because of the speed of the train. States he will never take it from Plaistow because of the time of travel. **RESPONSE: Ron O’Blenis** He visited the Haverhill parking locations and counted about 100 NH plates so there appears to be demand for the service from NH residents.

COMMENT: Pat Carroll (Wightman Rd) There was a vote issued by the Town and majority voted against the layover in Plaistow. Believes that the MBTA is giving a service to Boston and in return more noise and environmental issues.

COMMENT: Bill Consentino (Atkinson Selectmen) Believes that Bradford’s problems should not become Plaistow’s. If Plaistow does not want this in their town the consultants would take that into consideration.

COMMENT: Camille English (Marianne Drive) Asked if any of the consultants live near a layover facility. **RESPONSE: John Weston** Said he has lived near a layover facility and

realizes the trains produce noise but does have dramatically impact to him. **RESPONSE:** **Shelley Winters** We are not here to advocate any particular location. At the result of this study no build is still an option. From the NHDOT and consultant perspective we are here to give an overview and an understanding of the options.

COMMENT: **John Kimball (Plaistow Selectmen)** Explained that is not a done deal we are studying to get more information. Request to do this study came from the Plaistow and Atkinson Board of Selectmen. The approval and funds have come from that governor's council and that is why the study is taking place.

COMMENT: **Larry Gill (Resident of Plaistow)** Noted that when he started working for the Town (of Plaistow) that for positive improvements to happen transportation needs must be addressed. A lot of money is spent on improving Rt. 125 but the traffic is going to get worse. He understands there will be issues with the layover facility but mitigation can address them. He believes that the study should continue and if it is not then the town loses.

COMMENT: **Bob Wallogon (Brightwood Atkinson, NH)** Believes that the residents of Plaistow and Atkinson do not want the study to continue.

COMMENT: **Olaf Westfailin (221 Oakridge road)** Supports the idea of a train station and would like to have the opportunity to travel or work in Boston.

COMMENT: **Leah (East Rd)** Believes there is a problem with traffic and having a train station is an option to consider.

COMMENT: **Dave Harrigan (Atkinson)** Atkinson representative to the PAC responded that he does not believe the selectmen of Atkinson requested the study. People want access to Boston and they have that through Haverhill. Believes that using cell phone data and computer models is a passive way. He suggests looking at NH plates at Haverhill Station. Believes that people want to drive rather than take a train. Said the bus station failed because people did not use it and the train station will have the same problem.

COMMENT: **Jayne Harrison (Mayberry Drive, Atkinson, NH)** Asked if is a part in the process that you look at mitigation in other places to see if they work. She asked if there was any guarantee that the MBTA will stop using the layover facility if the passenger service is phased out. **RESPONSE:** **Ron O'Blenis** There is experience that after a noise wall is put up that they work. The noise walls reduce the noise but do not completely eliminate it. Once

we define the options future we were continue to develop an agreement with the MBTA.

COMMENT: Anna Welch (Bayberry Drive, Atkinson, NH) Her concern is how long is the process will last. **RESPONSE:** Ron O’Blenis We plan to come back to you in September with sites we are not going to concern and for the ones that have more potential mitigation analysis will be performed.

COMMENT: Kay Colloway (Atkinson) Believes it would have been helpful to have the presentation before hand, asked if the September meeting could provide that. **RESPONSE:** Ron O’Blenis He believes that sometimes it’s better to show it and explain it before distributing it. If there is document that we believe would be helpful to the public it will be posted on the website.

COMMENT: Steve Holloran If there is an interest in this area then why are they not here to support it. **RESPONSE:** John (Plaistow Selectmen) Believes the people that support the project do not attend the public meetings.

COMMENT: Jill Center (7 Maple Ave Plaistow, NH) She has lived 15-ft from the railroad tracks for many years and believes the trains do not produce that much noise. She believes cars emissions are dirty just like trains. The cars are becoming too numerous and this is one way to solve the issue.

COMMENT: Tony (Atkinson) Raised a concern about the estimated ridership. **RESPONSE:** Ron O’Blenis The cell phone data will be a useful tool for calculating ridership, that data we did not have before.

COMMENT: Audrey Peck Believes the word “needed” in the need statement is not the correct word to use. She believes it is wanted by a few and is not needed. Said a train to Boston would not help with economic development because most of the residents of Plaistow do not work in Boston. She is concerned about the increase of cars into Plaistow.

COMMENT: Atkinson Residents Suggested having a survey from surrounding towns. **RESPONSE:** John Weston The reason preference surveys do not always work is because people do not tell the truth or do not understand the question. **COMMENT:** Concerned about if the idle time is considered when calculating the environmental issues. **RESPONSE:** Ron O’Blenis We will be working with the MBTA to determine how long the train’s idle time is.

COMMENT: Atkinson Resident Asked who makes the final decision on this service? She believes that the layover is getting moved to Plaistow because no one in Plaistow can pressure the MBTA. She is concerned the people that are being affected will not be the ones making the decision if the project gets built.

Session ended at: 9:35 P.M.